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CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS

A Report from Hong Kong

by Albert Ravenholt

October 6, 1953

Ravenholt

The act of an individual sometimes may represent the end of an historical epoch, and so it was with the European priest who arrived late one afternoon last week at the barbed-wire barrier on the mainland frontier of this Colony. He halted while the Chinese Communist officer in the loose brown uniform and starred cap examined passes and travel documents. Although he was dressed in nondescript, baggy clothes and Chinese cloth shoes, the foreigner with his high nose, glasses, and blonde hair stood out among the Chinese laborers, amahs, peasant folk, and others dressed as such, who were waiting on both sides to cross. At a signal from the officer the glum-faced Chinese soldier wearing an old Japanese helmet brought his American-made carbine to attention and stepped away from the narrow opening in the barrier. The priest, carrying a woven string bag of personal effects and a briefcase, edged through and the trimly-clad officers of the Hongkong Police Force motioned him across the steel railway bridge toward the British border station of Lo Wu where several foreigners awaited him. The 47-year-old priest later admitted that it was the saddest day of his life. He had worked for 19 years in China and had expected to live out his life there in the service of his faith. Now he had been expelled.

This scene has been reenacted many times at the border station of the Kowloon-Canton Railway, where the Union Jack and the five-starred red flag fly over guard houses at opposite ends of the bridge and Chinese Communist officers refuse to speak to British officers a few feet away. This station has been the chief point of exit for more than 6,000 foreign Christian missionaries who have left China within the last three years and given accounts of Christian experience under the Communists that varied according to the regions from which they came but revealed general trends. Some of the missionaries were ill after serving in Communist prisons and could hardly walk when they reached the frontier. Many cried as they crossed the bridge. Others knelt and kissed the gravel between the railway ties when they reached British territory. There remain in China only about 380 foreign Catholic priests, brothers and sisters, and of these some 60 are reported in jail. Foreign Protestant missionaries still in China may number less than 20--no unified organization keeps a record of all the many nationalities and denominations--and roughly half of these are imprisoned or under house-arrest and some others are too old to leave. These foreign Christians are no longer permitted to work. This mass exodus of missionaries marks the end of an effort that began one year and four centuries ago when the great Jesuit "Apostle to the Indies," Francis Xavier, died on the tiny rocky island of Sancian off the China coast about one hundred miles southwest of here, after vainly seeking entry to the "Forbidden Kingdom."

This termination of an enterprise that has been described as the "most ambitious foreign missionary effort in the history of Christendom" now leaves the Chinese churches on their own. Chinese Christians are faced with the need to discover in what form, if any, they can maintain their churches and practice their faith in an antagonistic, Communist-run state. In China the thorough imposition of the "Peoples Democratic Dictatorship" has left religion as the principal remaining competitor with Communism for the supreme allegiance of men's minds. The future character and fate of Chinese Christianity, therefore, will determine more than the survival of the teachings of Jesus Christ in the world's most populous nation; at stake is the issue of whether other values will temper the harsh, materialistic intolerance of the Communist dogma and teachings that are being so efficiently instilled into the minds of most Chinese.

Christianity first reached China long before Francis Xavier attempted his ill-fated mission. Nestorian Christians, who as traders, teachers, and nomads had carried

their faith throughout Central Asia, brought their "illustrious religion" to the Chinese capital of Chang An near the present city of Sian early in the seventh century. There, under the protection of the able and tolerant Tang dynasty emperor Tai Tsung, the Nestorians established congregations and trained priests. Despite later periodic persecution by unfriendly officials and competition from Taoism and Buddhism, which was introduced almost simultaneously, the Nestorians maintained churches in widely separated cities of China for about six centuries. European medieval travelers who followed the overland trade routes to Asia found the Nestorians had converted many of the semi-nomadic peoples along the way and become a powerful influence at some courts of the Mongol empires. But Nestorian Christianity lost its identity, perhaps in the 14th century, and its followers merged with other sects. The faith seems to have been forgotten even by Chinese scholars until the discovery near Sian in the 17th century of an eight-foot stone tablet carved with the early history of this lost Christian movement in China.

The conquests of Genghis Khan and his followers that pushed back the Mohammedans and opened Central Asian trade routes to Europe also enabled the Roman Catholic Church to send its first missionaries to China. Foremost among these was John of Montecorvino. Although violently opposed by the Nestorians, he won respect in the Mongol capital on the site of the present Peking and built several churches. When John of Montecorvino died in 1328, after 34 years of missionary work in China, it is estimated that he and his European Franciscan and Dominican assistants had converted perhaps 100,000 followers, including members of churches established in South and East China. War then cut the trade routes, the Black Death and the Hundred Years' War halted support for European missionary efforts, and the Mongol dynasty was replaced by the nationalistic Chinese Ming emperors. The Catholic churches also disappeared, probably within that century. Like the Nestorians, these Christian communities started by the Roman Church became the casualties of a resurgent emphasis on Chinese culture and a philosophical tolerance that discouraged distinctions in religious belief.

Modern Christian missionary efforts in China started with the 16th century European development of sea routes to the Far East. And the newly-established order of the Society of Jesus opened the field that some felt offered Christianity its greatest opportunity since the conversion of the peoples of Europe. The failure of Francis Xavier and other early missionaries convinced

the Jesuits that simple proselytizing methods used elsewhere were not suited to their new task. Instead, the Jesuits mastered China's language, history and customs, cultivated her scholars and officials and won the all-important imperial favor that enabled them to establish their headquarters in Peking. They failed to realize their elaborate schemes to convert the Chinese emperor and, thereby, to make Christianity the official religion. But the Jesuits became counselors, teachers and "bringers of Western knowledge" at the court for nearly 200 years. Their influence was so great that they survived the decay of the Ming dynasty, the rise of the Manchus, and innumerable official intrigues. They were able to ease the persecutions that repeatedly hounded their priests who were carrying the faith throughout the land. At the height of their prestige, early in the 18th century, the Jesuits claimed more than 300,000 converts and had built churches in all but three provinces of China proper.

The Jesuit position crumbled as a bitter controversy began within the church over their practice of permitting Chinese Christians to pay homage to ancestors and feuds developed with other Catholic orders that had come to work in China. When the Pope ruled against the Jesuit practices he undermined their position at court and forced Chinese Christians to choose between their faith and allegiance to the imperial Confucian-oriented system wherein some of them held important posts. Growing European opposition to the Jesuits also handicapped their missionary efforts and finally brought about the suppression of the Society in 1773. The Lazarists and other orders that took over from the Jesuits lacked their diplomatic skill, scholarship and capacity for focusing action upon critical opportunities. Persecution soon reduced the number of practicing Chinese Catholics by one-half, and forced many of these to worship secretly.

British and other Western naval vessels and troops that in the mid-19th century forced China to open her ports to foreign trade created new religious opportunities and the Protestant churches of Europe and America launched a vigorous missionary effort to Christianize the Chinese. The "unequal treaties" whereby the Manchu regime awarded foreigners extra-territorial rights and concessions protected missionaries and their property. Many of them started in their mission fields with simulated Mandarin ranks. Their translation of the scriptures brought early and unexpected results. They inspired Hung Hsui-chuan to start a religious society that grew into the great Tai Ping Rebellion. These revolutionaries who adopted

a modified version of Christianity as their creed captured control of China's most populous areas and were on the verge of destroying the Manchu regime. The Protestant missionaries, however, refused to accept the Tai Pings as true Christians. Western governments and merchants helped the Manchus with funds, arms, and foreign advisors to crush the movement. It is estimated that before the Tai Pings were quelled more than 15 million Chinese had lost their lives. It was probably China's greatest social upheaval until recent times. And the Tai Pings had provided the chief object lesson later studied by the Chinese Communists. Because this Christian-inspired Chinese revolution coincided with the American Civil War, it was largely ignored abroad and has tended to become lost in the historical shuffle.

Protestant missionaries brought more than Christianity to China. In an effort to secure acceptance of their faith and demonstrate a new way of life, many missionaries worked as educators and doctors. Although some were killed when foreign and Chinese Christians became the chief targets of the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion in 1900, their work prospered as Western influence reached into China. They led in the introduction of science, particularly after the Manchu dynasty was replaced by the Republic in 1911. The 13 Christian colleges and universities the Protestant missionaries helped found produced a large proportion of the Chinese who introduced Western technology and values into their society. Modern medicine in China is primarily a missionary contribution--during the last war with Japanese almost three-fourths of the first-rate hospitals operating in Free China were Christian institutions. The "golden period" of Protestant efforts followed World War I when there were more than 6,000 foreign missionaries in China. Many young Chinese who were impatient with the stiff conventions of their classical society, such as arranged marriages, turned to Christianity. And, in a sense, the Methodists succeeded where the Jesuits had failed two centuries earlier when they brought Chiang Kai-shek into their church. The YMCA and YWCA centers that were established in the larger cities of China often became meeting places for the younger modern-minded Chinese who wanted to share in rebuilding their old nation. For a time the missionary movement became the principal vehicle for the great cultural importations from the West that helped Chinese society break the mold in which it had been frozen for almost a thousand years. Protestant converts who numbered perhaps three quarters of a million comprised an important segment of that estimated ten percent of the Chinese whose literacy and skills enable them to manage their country's affairs.

As the 20th century brought civil and international war to China most Protestant missions learned the importance of training Chinese pastors and lay leaders for the churches they had established. The Northern Expedition of 1926-27 that gave power to the Nationalist Government also unleashed such accumulated anti-foreign sentiment that European and American missionaries were forced to evacuate large areas of China. Those who returned to their posts when the disturbances subsided discovered that the churches which had suffered least were those with the largest share of Chinese leadership. Japanese armies that moved into China after 1937 sometimes wrecked mission property and halted much Christian work. As allied nationals, many Protestant missionaries who remained in Occupied China were interned after Pearl Harbor. Again the churches that had depended most upon foreign funds and workers proved after V.J.Day to have the weakest congregations. Partly as a result of these experiences the post-war Protestant churches were largely Chinese run and most foreign missionaries had surrendered their earlier authority and become advisors. Religious work was supported primarily with local funds, although foreign contributions continued to finance much Christian educational and medical work and reconstruction of war-damaged property.

Throughout this period a minority of Chinese and foreign Christian leaders tried to interpret their faith to meet the material wants of the people among whom they sought to propagate their faith. In North China a group of farsighted Christians worked through their churches to start a vigorous rural cooperative movement that provided farmers with the cheap credit and other similar facilities which they urgently needed. Some of the mission schools led in introducing scientific agricultural methods, public health, literacy, and handicraft industries. Christianity inspired Dr. James Y.C. Yen and many of his associates in pioneering the Mass Education Movement that promised answers to some of the "felt needs" of ordinary peasant farmers. But these activities represented a small fraction of missionary efforts and most of them were uprooted by the Japanese attack in 1937 that forced nationally-conscious Chinese to retreat into the interior.

Christian groups did not evolve a dynamic program that offered any large segment of literate Chinese early and workable answers to the immediate problems of mass poverty, feudal patterns of rural property ownership and authority, and accumulated injustices which Christianity itself had helped expose. During the last 30 years this failure cost the Christian movement the support of a large and growing

number of educated, idealistic Chinese who rejected the present and were determined to build a "New China." Throughout the struggle with Japan and the post-war era there were other Chinese who sought a solution by trying to fit Communism in alongside of their Christianity--the pressures for change in the society had become so pervasive that the alert individual often was not satisfied only with his religion as a guide to living. Significantly, graduates of the fine Christian university of Yenching in Peking, who from 1937 to 1941 joined the Red guerrillas in the surrounding countryside to fight the Japanese, apparently have remained staunch members of the Communist movement since then and some have become important officials under the new regime.

While the Protestants frequently worked with the literate new urban groups who prospered on foreign commerce and manufacturing, Catholic missionaries during the century and a half following the Jesuit failure concentrated on China's rural folk. Catholic missions profited by the same treaty provisions that protected foreign Protestants and Western merchants. Some of the Catholic missions became large landowners; during a period of fluctuating currencies and intermittent civil war, land was the most secure form of rural investment and rentals were used to support orphanages, schools and other mission work. Although the Catholics started three universities in addition to numerous primary and middle schools, they usually did not seek to remake Chinese society--their primary objective was the Christianizing of the populace within the existing social order. The Catholics trained only a relatively small number of men to become leaders in government and specialized technical fields. This emphasis upon gaining converts and the use of a foreign mission staff that at its post-World War II peak numbered about 7,000 enabled the Catholics to bring an estimated three million Chinese into their churches.

Catholics in China, however, were slow to achieve unity of action. Friction between religious orders occasionally handicapped their mission work despite the less prominent role assumed by the Jesuits after their 1814 restoration--though the Catholics never again suffered from fierce doctrinal disputes such as also divided some early Protestant groups. Until World War I the French Government tried to act as the special protector of the Catholic Church in China on the grounds that citizens of France predominated among its missionaries. At that time the Belgians and Dutch maintained larger missions in proportion to

their home populations, and Italians, Swiss, Germans, Spaniards, Irish and other nationalities were represented. This sometimes involved priests in international power politics. French and other European priests serving in China who were drafted during the first world war suffered severe casualties. Several of their missions later were taken over by American Catholics. But some European missions deteriorated as the remaining priests aged and were unable to work vigorously and few young priests arrived to replace them. It was only in 1924 that the Catholic Church in China held its first Plenary Council and an Apostolic Delegate was appointed.

Catholic emphasis upon rural work made their missionaries ready targets for the armies that roamed across China throughout the civil struggles and wars of this century. The Chinese Communists officially relaxed their early opposition to foreign missionaries in 1937. But during the war with Japan, Communist guerrillas in North and East China usually treated as enemies Axis and neutral priests whom the Japanese had permitted to remain. Rural converts to Catholicism included comparatively few Chinese who had the knowledge and facility of expression to "argue effectively with a middle school teacher." They usually were a poor match for the indoctrinated cadres who recruited for the Communist cause. Further, Catholic missionaries assigned to China for life often saw no urgency about training Chinese priests as replacements. Chinese priests numbered only about 2,800 at the height of post-war Christian influence.

Catholic leaders realized the threat to their church of these developments soon after Japan's surrender revealed the strength of the Communist movement and armies throughout China. Several prominent Church officials sought influence within the Nationalist Government as a means of encouraging what they hoped would be more effective action to halt the Communists. But most Catholic leaders in China lacked experience in grappling with social and political problems and formulating a program with popular appeal. Instead, they succeeded in identifying themselves with a regime that was increasingly scorned by the Chinese people and most of these Catholic leaders fled with the Nationalists from the mainland. A major Catholic response to the threat of the times was the organization of the "Legion of Mary"--an attempt to mobilize lay Catholic leadership for the defense of the Church and the propagation of the faith. The Legion of Mary was started in 1947 and sought to enlist the most educated, articulate and active Church members. Less than ten percent of all Catholics joined. They, however, were the most effective members. They were organized to help the priests, to bring back into the fold those who had "fallen

away," to visit the sick and otherwise instill a greater sense of community among Catholics.

The Red Army victories of 1949 that completed Communist conquest of the mainland of China and brought the new Central Peoples Government to power in Peking found the Catholics preparing for what they expected would be their supreme test. Many of them thought the first year of Communist rule was an anti-climax. In most areas religious work continued with relatively little interference, considering the nature of the civil war that had engulfed China. Funds for relief and mission work could be sent in from abroad. Some Catholics were encouraged to believe the new regime in Peking might abide by the promise of religious freedom contained in Article Five of the Common Program, the basic document drafted by the Communists in 1949 as a guide for governing China.

The great persecution of the Catholic Church in China began on the eve of the outbreak of the Korean War. It was intensified after the "Chinese Peoples Volunteers" pushed south across the Yalu River in late October 1950. The Communist rulers used the Korean war against "American Imperialist Aggression" to justify speeding Chinese society through a series of mass physical and mental purges known by such names as "Land Reform," "Liquidation of the Counter-Revolutionary Elements" and the "Three Anti and Five Anti Campaigns." The war also provided the opportunity and excuse for the attempted destruction of the Roman Church in China.

The most readily measurable feature of the Communist campaign against the Catholic Church has been the systematic expulsion of foreign missionaries. At the start of the severe persecution in January 1951 there were in China about 3,000 foreign priests and a small number of lay brothers grouped in 35 mission societies and representing 30 nationalities. Foreign Catholic sisters numbered about 2,000 and were organized into 56 societies. An almost infinite variety of charges have been used to justify ridding China of these missionaries, except the accusation that they were foreign Catholics. The record is one of suffering and martyrdom on a scale that must rank as one of the great testimonials of the Catholic Church.

Accounts of missionaries who have come out of China illustrate the methods employed by the new regime. The Mission Chronicle records that Father Peter Crevits arrived in Hongkong last December after expulsion from Suiyuan Province in North China. "...It was in his parish on the 7th of March 1951 when he started prayers at the foot of the altar for Mass that

his church was surrounded by 40 men with revolvers and two other carloads of Communists. At pistol point he was forced to take off the Mass vestments, was bound hand and foot and carried off to jail. His glasses were taken away so that he couldn't recognize his interrogators; if his answers didn't please the questioners he was beaten in the face. For nine days he was kept in a small cell where he was bound hand and foot. From the time of his imprisonment until his release, Father Crevits was questioned for long hours more than one hundred times, during which he endured frequent beatings. In his trial he was accused of relations with the United States; later he was accused of having a radio and 75 revolvers when he had none of these items. He was frequently questioned as to the names of the foreign and Chinese priests with whom he had dealings; if he refused to give names he was slapped. Blacksmiths were called in and wrist and ankle shackles were forged on, which made it necessary for fellow prisoners to help him in eating, drinking and taking care of other needs of nature. In December of 1951 with the weather at 30 degrees below zero and no fire, Father Crevits fell ill..." During the following year the priest suffered from typhus, was forbidden to make the sign of the cross and required to pray "only in his heart." The train by which he finally was expelled from Suiyuan Province carried a loud-speaker that broadcast the misdeeds of the "imperialistic missionary."

Several weeks ago two Spanish priests and a Spanish lay brother arrived here from the diocese of Pingliang in China's northwestern province of Kansu. Their troubles had started with land reform in the summer of 1951, when their church and mission were taken over by "the people." Brain-washing and indoctrination were carried from the community into the seminary and the students became "more fanatical than the Reds themselves." Their ex-students "guarded" the missionaries while they were under house-arrest and treated the foreigners so roughly that they were replaced by regular police. Last July the three missionaries were brought to public trial before about 10,000 people. They were accused of "espionage under the guise of teaching religion, imperialism, and fostering the Legion of Mary." The lay brother was also accused of "murdering 91 percent of all the orphans" for whom the mission had cared, because he had marked the graves of dead infants. After being condemned to expulsion by the aroused mob, the Spanish priests were sent under armed escort by train to the Hongkong border.

Many missionaries have spent a year or two in jail and undergone intensive brain-washing and forced Communist

indoctrination. Some have been accused of murder or manacled and beaten, and others have been stoned and systematically spat upon by the frenzied crowds incited to condemn them. The known foreign dead include one archbishop and three bishops who perished in Chinese prisons. At the head of the list of those expelled from China is H.E. Archbishop Antonius Riberi, Apostolic Internuncio in China. This Communist campaign has reduced the number of foreign priests and lay brothers in China to about 252 and the remaining sisters to perhaps 117.

The process of "struggle through land reform" that all of China, except the areas of national minorities, experienced in 1951 and 1952 deprived the Catholics of many rural churches and other mission buildings. Loss of church lands meant the end of support for orphanages, old people's homes and other institutions. Chinese religious women who numbered 5,000-odd before the Communists arrived thereby were left without work and many have been released from their vows and returned home. The Communist regime has taken over and reorganized or disbanded the three Catholic universities, 189 middle schools and nearly all of the 2,011 primary schools and 2,243 prayer schools. They have strictly enforced the practice begun by the Chinese Nationalists of barring religious instruction in schools. The new government has confiscated or reorganized all but one of the 32 Catholic presses that printed textbooks, catechisms, and other religious literature.

The Chinese Communists regard the Legion of Mary as an "aggressive and militaristic organization receiving orders from the imperialistic Vatican" and consider its destruction a necessary prelude to their attempts to build an independent Catholic Church. Early in April 1951 the "Tientsin Catholic Church Reform Promotion Association" held its inaugural meeting. The Communist press reported their objectives in the words of the presiding bishop: "Hereafter the mission of all Catholics is to cut off all links with imperialism, convert the Catholic Church into an organization operated by the Chinese people themselves, help the government suppress counter-revolutionaries and develop the 'Resist America and Aid Korea Movement.' Only in this manner can the sympathy of people throughout the nation be obtained."

Two days earlier students and faculty at Tsin Ku University, which was formerly Catholic, had "uncovered" three French Jesuits allegedly acting as American spies. They were the former vice president of the university and the deans of the Colleges of Engineering and Commerce. But the chief charge

held against the three Jesuits was obstructing the reform movement among Catholics by refusing Holy Communion to signers of the Communist-inspired reform declarations, in keeping with the Pope's automatic excommunication of those who joined an independent church. Late in June 1951, the Tientsin Public Security Bureau "unearthed a counter-revolutionary secret league composed of elements of the Legion of Mary." They also were charged with opposing the Catholic reform movement and the chief culprit was a Dutch priest whose followers had "sent threatening letters to patriotic Catholics." In July the Tientsin Military Control Commission prohibited the Legion of Mary "for the protection of the interests of the people" on the grounds that it could "no longer be considered a religious organization." All officers of the Legion were required to register with the authorities and promised "magnanimous treatment."

The Tientsin episode set a pattern followed later in Peking, Shanghai, Canton, and other large cities and led to the China-wide banning of the Legion of Mary. Most Catholics have ceased complying with the Communist requirement that Legion members register since they discovered this usually brought severe penalties. The Legion now does not function as an organization, but Communist persecution of its members continues. There have been periodic--but difficult to confirm--reports of executions of Chinese Christians on charges of working for the Legion of Mary.

This pressure to break the hold of the Roman Church on lay Catholics has been matched by an even more intense persecution of Chinese Catholic clergy. Perhaps a hundred Catholic priests have died in prison or been executed, often after hysterical public trials. It is estimated that between 300 and 400 Chinese priests are presently in jail. At least 500 Chinese priests are working quietly in lay dress within their districts. Among the 1,800 priests who are believed to be still working openly are many who must support themselves by manual labor and attend to their parishioners only in spare time. In a few large cities, such as Shanghai, Catholic churches still are available for Mass, although the police have warned the priests this state of affairs will be temporary. So far only a small fraction of the clergy have joined the Catholic Reformed Church--priests who have come out to this Colony recently believe that there are substantial "progressive movements" in less than one-fifth of the dioceses--and many of these are renegades, opportunists, and priests over whom the Communists held a special threat such as punishment for collaboration with the Japanese. Though the Communists have failed to organize a vigorous reformed Catholic Church to serve their ends, they have almost broken the Roman Church in

China. Today most priests who remain free can work only quietly and inconspicuously. Many Catholics whose faith has been deepened by persecution and who refuse to accept excommunication and the Reformed Church now worship secretly in small groups.

Foreign priests expelled from China report that the Communists plan a 20-year program to eradicate the Catholic faith. And it seems that a major effort will be made to deny the Catholics opportunities to train young priests, or to let them train only those who will follow the Communist line on religion. Six Catholic seminaries continue to function in China, and two of these give incomplete training. Approximately 100 students are enrolled of whom about 15 are expected to finish their studies next year. Within four or five years all of these students will have left the seminaries. And, since Catholic schools have been closed, the only seminary candidates available will be the Communist-indoctrinated graduates of government schools. Even if graduates of Communist-run schools could be encouraged to attend the Catholic seminaries, there is little prospect that they would become the kind of priests that the Roman Church needs to survive with institutional integrity in China.

While China's Catholics chose direct and sometimes open opposition to the Communists, Protestant churches have sought to "bend with the wind of revolutionary change." This attempt to adjust to the new order was facilitated by the Communist decision, made before they seized complete power, to class the Protestant churches as "progressive elements capable of reform." With Communist-supervised reform now a condition of survival for Protestant churches, there arises the critical question of the extent to which they are retaining their spiritual integrity.

Chinese Protestant churches, like the Catholics, experienced an initial period of "benign rule" following the Red Army victory. The first clear indications of some changes to come were provided in June 1950 when the new government called Chinese Protestant leaders to a conference in Peking. Chou En-lai, the Premier and Foreign Minister, told the church leaders that, although the Communists considered Christianity a superstition, they recognized some Protestant social and educational contributions as helpful to China and would permit Christians to continue preaching their religion. However, he continued, education and social services would soon become the responsibility of

the government. Chinese churches must receive no foreign aid and no foreign missionaries would be admitted to China, except doctors and other useful persons who refrained from evangelizing. Missionaries already in China would be permitted to remain, the Premier added, provided they obeyed the laws of the new regime.

Although foreign Protestant missionaries in China numbered more than 4,000 at the height of post-war efforts, this group already had been reduced by about one-half when the new government was established in Peking on October 1, 1949. Obvious hostility and suspicion of conquering Red troops and political cadres toward Westerners soon convinced many foreign missionaries that their continued presence in China would prove a liability to their Chinese Christian colleagues. When Peking's announcement of opposition to foreign mission work was followed by the outbreak of the Korean War, most remaining Protestant missionaries took it as a warning to leave. With Chinese intervention in Korea in October 1950 the United States, which had supported the largest share of Protestant efforts, officially became an enemy country. Thereafter American and other Protestant missionaries suffered on a much smaller scale the kind of trials, imprisonment and persecution Catholics experienced. The high degree of Chinese leadership developed within the Protestant churches, their lack of large land holdings, and the official sanction of sorts afforded their movement eased the fate of many Protestant missionaries. It is also evident that the Catholic missionaries who were not troubled with family responsibilities often welcomed martyrdom and the publicity it gave their cause. Protestant missionaries usually sought to quietly adjust to circumstances and only a handful now remain in China.

As "progressive elements" cooperating with the new regime, Chinese Protestant churches necessarily have participated in the mass campaigns whereby the Communists have imposed their stamp upon Chinese life. On December 22, 1950, 400 delegates from churches, YMCA, YWCA, and other religious groups held a "Resist America and Aid Korea Patriotic Rally" in Shanghai. They were told "American imperialism" was their greatest enemy and that it used religion domestically as an instrument of repression and externally as a tool of aggression. Christians were asked to name their sons who volunteered for military service and pledge collection of comfort bags for troops in Korea. Similar meetings were organized by Christians in Hankow, Sian, Changsha and other cities. Published figures indicate Chinese Protestants collected the equivalent of about US$122,000 to support the Chinese war effort in Korea. Special "movements" were launched to insure that Christians--Protestants and Catholics--signed patriotic pacts, protested

against Japanese rearmament, condemned statements by American representatives in the United Nations and otherwise shared in Communist mass indoctrination. In rural areas pastors and church leaders were forced to join in land reform and the often grizzly mob trials and executions of landowners and "counter-revolutionaries." Christians suffered severely through the violent accusations and penalties of the "Three Anti and Five Anti Campaigns" that rocked Chinese urban society and helped fit it to the Communist mold. Pressure to denounce friends and confess wrongs of which they were innocent forced some outstanding Christians to suicide.

Meanwhile, Chinese Protestant Churches have gone through their own Communist-guided "struggle of inner cleansing." The period of greatest turmoil and suffering lasted from early 1951 well into 1952. On December 29, 1950 the Government Administrative Council, which functions as a national cabinet, issued directives for the disposal of Christian institutions that had been assisted by the United States. When Christian leaders were summoned to Peking for briefing the vice chairman of the Bureau on Educational, Cultural and Religious Affairs told them that "disposal of American-subsidized Christian bodies and institutions is not just a technical problem but a struggle--the aim is to eliminate thoroughly the influence of a century of American imperialist cultural aggression against China." This theme has guided the government takeover and reorganization of Christian universities, colleges, middle schools, primary schools and hospitals. The names of the institutions usually have been changed. Where possible, Christian colleges and universities have been divided and combined with government institutions in such a manner as to destroy their identity and character. The staffs of these institutions have undergone tortuous procedures of group criticism of their past activities and thoughts. Leading staff members have been shifted so as to destroy their personal influence and following--sometimes husbands and wives have been separated as they were forced to keep their teaching posts in different colleges of a university that was scattered through reorganization.

Within Protestant religious organizations reform was given the name "Three Self Movement"--self-government through termination of contacts with foreign mother churches, self-preaching by Chinese emphasizing Chinese themes, and self-support through cessation of contributions from abroad. This "liberation from foreign control" could be accomplished only through use of the Chinese Communist technique of "struggle." Even in

previously harmonious organizations this began with hidden or appointed agents arousing conflict with the leaders. Many Chinese Christians who were fooled by the slogans of the "new democracy" hastened to criticize as outmoded some of the old practices of their leaders. The criticisms grew into mass accusation meetings where Christian leaders purged themselves for earlier mistakes, castigated Chinese colleagues and attacked the "imperialist aggression" of foreign missionaries.

The National Christian Council of China on June 1,1951, held such an accusation meeting in Shanghai with a reported 1200 persons present where it was charged that the Council for 20 years had served as a foreign espionage center. Past contributions from the Rockefeller family for "preaching the gospels to factory workers" were condemned as attempts to oppose Communism. The Communist-controlled press reported that ten days later at another large accusation meeting Bishop Chiang Chang-chuan "carried out a thoroughgoing examination of his mistake in having baptized Chiang Kai-shek. He announced on behalf of the Chinese Methodist Church the expulsion of bandits Chiang Kai-shek and Soong Mei-ling from said church." Special accusation meetings "exposed" the Christian Literature Society as "an instrument of American aggression against China." It was "revealed" that more than 60 percent of nearly 2,000 items published during the last 65 years by the Christian Publishing House were "translations from American texts designed mainly to spread anti-Soviet and anti-Communist propaganda."

Supervision of "reform" within Protestant churches has been entrusted to a national "Three Selves Committee" headed by Y. T. Wu, former chief editor of the YMCA Association Press. This Committee seems to exercise unchallenged authority. Wu has led in making violent denunciations of Christians who in the past worked closely with foreigners and now have been slow to disown their past. These charges have been used to depose and compromise many of the finest leaders within the Protestant churches. One bishop was arrested at night nearly three years ago and even today his family is believed to be ignorant of his whereabouts. A leading Christian educator was sentenced to 12 years of hard labor and sent as a member of a labor contingent to work on the Huai River flood control project. A Christian university president has been in jail for more than two years on charges that have never been clarified. Many leading Chinese Christians have been immobilized through house-arrest or restricted liberty and now are "voluntarily"

studying Marxism. Some pastors have been ousted from their churches. Reports from several of China's largest cities tell of special one-month indoctrination courses for preachers on the ideology of the new regime.

Printing and sale of approximately 85 percent of Protestant publications has been banned. Items on the forbidden list include commentaries, biographies of religious leaders and writings of such Christians as E. Stanley Jones. The National Christian Council's publication, Hsieh Chin, fills about three-fourths of its pages with items from the Communist press. Tien Feng, which was started as the Chinese equivalent of the Christian Century, has become the organ of the Three Selves Committee. These publications regularly reinterpret the scriptures to fit Communist purposes; denunciation of the Pharisees by Jesus is used to justify the new regime's accusation proceedings. The YMCA and YWCA functioned in 29 cities of China when the Communists took power. Those Associations that continue working do so at the price of not opposing the aims of the new government and announcing that they will "go forward under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung." Three Protestant seminaries are open in Peking, Nanking and Canton. The curricula, however, must be approved by the Three Selves Committee and the government, and students are exposed to heavy doses of Communist indoctrination. Most of the powerful compulsions available to an efficient, totalitarian government are used to compel conformity, including the provision that only after a congregation is certified as having complied with the Three Self Program will it be given free and tax-exempt use of that portion of its property intended for religious purposes.

It is too early to judge the extent to which this outward conformity with the new Communist order has subverted the inner spiritual content of Chinese Protestant Christianity. There is perhaps no people more skillful than the Chinese at hiding true feelings behind a facade of acquiescence. Chinese Protestants clearly have chosen this course of action as a means of protecting their faith. The Communists apparently discovered that their earlier insistence upon preachers incorporating political doctrine in sermons sometimes created the opportunity for subtle ridicule of the new regime; recently ministers in several larger cities have been advised to "preach only religion." The pressure of political persecution and the trend toward lay preachers encourages more fundamentalist churches that avoid open deviation from national policies. The greatest threat to the churches is among the young who are the chief targets of Communist indoctrination that treats religion scornfully. Young people are kept constantly busy; even on Sundays it is difficult for Christian families to compete with Communist domination of their children's minds.

The advent of Communism also has encouraged "rice Christians" to leave the churches. At the same time, it has tested and strengthened the religious faith of many who remain. The two new Protestant churches built in Shanghai since the Communist takeover attest to the possibilities for continued Christian work in large urban centers.

The Communists evidently intend to use the Catholic Reformed Church and Protestant churches only temporarily. They have said "if you do not press too hard, religion as a superstition will die of itself." But the new regime's official sanction of religion gives Christians a limited opportunity. There is evidence that a small but growing number of educated Chinese are looking to religion--this may be true of Buddhism and Mohammedanism as well as Christianity--as a means of retaining their integrity of personality amidst the incessant pressure for Communist conformity. Like many non-Communist Chinese, they want to avoid becoming "one of that awful mass without identity." The opportunity to satisfy this inner need through membership in a Christian group seeking a spiritual experience is now available only in those Chinese Communities where churches already function. Elsewhere the new revolutionary regime discourages the establishment of any faith that might compete with the Communist creed.

An appraisal of the extent to which China's Communist rulers are destroying the Roman Catholic Church and subverting the Protestant churches is necessarily limited by the fragmentary information coming out through missionaries and Chinese travelers, in letters and mainland publications. Christian experience in one county town of Central-South China on which details are available suggests, however, some dimensions of the changes now in progress. The Catholic Church ceased to function as a visible organization when the foreign priest left the community some six weeks ago and the police took over the mission buildings as an addition to their headquarters. Catholic signatures on the petition demanding the priest's expulsion were secured only through continued official pressure; several Catholics came secretly and assured the priest of their love and respect despite public denunciations. One Chinese Catholic was deprived of his highly prized title of "Old Revolutionary"--public recognition of his membership in the Communist Movement since before the "Long March" in 1934--because he refused to sign the expulsion petition. Local police who escorted the priest to the train were friendly but explained they must obey orders. They added: "The Catholic Church has to be eliminated."

Throughout the past four years of Communist rule in the community only a few members of Protestant and Catholic congregations had "fallen away." They included three young men who were forced to give up Catholicism when they joined the Communist political cadres. Other young people were being lured away from Christian interests through indoctrination and discipline. Those who remained Christians, and particularly Catholics, often found they were barred from admission to the middle school and denied other opportunities. Christians over the age of 20 usually clung firmly to their faith. Most Chinese Christians agreed that those who "ate public rice" were most vulnerable--any Christian working for the government would sooner or later be denounced by professional colleagues. The more economically independent families such as shoemakers, carpenters, small tradesmen and farmers were best able to withstand Communist indoctrination of their children. A second "Old Revolutionary" whose wife was a Protestant had let his five children be baptized Catholics and insisted they attend Mass every Sunday. He had become more interested in Christianity since he lost his first enthusiasm for Communist rule.

The local Protestant church which included many of the "best citizens" in the community--"the honest ones who personally avoided politics"--had elected a new preacher with the approval of the county magistrate's office. The pastor was formerly well regarded, but preaching was the only profession he knew and the Communists sent a cadre every Sunday to listen to his sermons. These sermons were now less ably prepared and larded with politics. The preacher also had lost interest in holding weekly prayer meetings and visiting the sick. But the Protestant "mutual help society" continued to demonstrate their religion through an effective "spirit of charity." When some of the devout elderly Protestant women tired of their minister's changed performance and wanted to secure his dismissal they learned that could only be accomplished with government permission. Meanwhile, their congregation must continue to pay the preacher and not complain about the new style of sermons.

Sincerely,

Albert Ravenholt

Albert Ravenholt

% United States Consulate
General,
Hong Kong.

DATE DUE

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